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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: AUGUST 31, 2009

Media Reaction Summary: August 31, 2009

Summary: Reports and photographs of "killing of 16 police cadets in a suicide attack in Mingora a month after the Pakistan Army claimed the area had been cleared of Taliban" dominated headlines in all newspapers on Monday. Newspapers also highlighted reports that Pakistan "categorically rejected" a New York Times story accusing that "Pakistan illegally modified the U.S.-made missiles." Pakistani Ambassador to Washington Haqqani's remarks terming the report as "baseless and incorrect" received prominent front-page display. Several major dailies also published a Washington Post article that the "U.S. has set metrics to gauge progress in Afghanistan and Pakistan." The weekend editions of the newspapers gave extensive coverage to Ambassador Robin Raphel's talk to a select group of journalists quoting her as saying that "U.S. aid's administrative cost would be minimized." Reports of the "U.S. donation of Protective Gear to Pakistan to help cope with outbreaks of bird flu" were also highlighted.

Most major newspapers ran editorials on the government's announcement of the internal autonomy to the Northern Areas and its possible fallouts. However some dailies opted to editorialize other issues including the uneasy peace in the Swat valley, U.S. Admiral Mullen's remarks and the Karzai-Holbrooke meeting. The Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn," observed that the Admiral Mullen's observations should be noted by the American media, especially some of the leading dailies which have played a major role in distorting reality and portraying the Taliban as the true representatives of Muslims worldwide." In its editorial on the "Karzai-Holbrooke meeting" the center-right national English daily "The Nation," noted that the "USA looks to working with Mr. Karzai in a second term, but also wishes to use the election issue, along with corruption and his links with various warlords, to keep up the pressure on him." Commenting on the proposed "expansion plan of the U.S. Embassy," the Karachi-based, pro-Taliban Jihadi Urdu daily "Islam," opined that the "killing of several innocent Pakistanis including women and children in the recent U.S. drone attack will provide an opportunity to Ambassador Patterson to know that why majority of the Pakistanis see the U.S. presence in their country with suspicion, whether it is in the form of U.S. Marines, or the infamous Blackwater." End Summary.

News Stories

"Suicide Bomber Kills 16 Police Cadets In Swat" "Dawn" and "The Nation" (08/31)

"A terrorist blew himself up inside a police training centre in Mingora on Sunday, killing 16 recruits of the newly-formed Community Police Force and injuring four others, a month after the Pakistan army claimed the area had been cleared of Taliban."

"Pakistan Illegally Modified U.S. Missile: NYT" "The News" (08/31)

"Pakistan on Sunday rejected US government claims that it illegally modified American-made missiles and said the accusation were part of a campaign to 'malign it and its armed forces.' Modification to anti-ship missile made them capable of hitting land based targets and thus threatening India, The New York Times said on Saturday."

"Pakistan Denies It Modified American Anti-Ship Missile" "Dawn" (08/31)

"Pakistan rejected accusations its army illegally modified American made missiles to increase its land-strike capability, denying that it reconfigured anti-ship weapons in a way that could target India. A statement from Pakistan's Foreign Ministry said on Sunday that it 'categorically rejected' the article in The New York Times saying that Harpoon anti-ship missiles had been modified and that they could pose a potential threat to India. Pakistan's Ambassador Hussain Haqqani termed the NYT report baseless and incorrect."

"CIA should keep an eye on Dr Khan, says Cheney" "Dawn" (08/31)

"Former US vice-president Dick Cheney said on Sunday that instead of probing CIA's interrogation techniques, the Obama administration should use the agency to find what A. Q. Khan was up to."

"US Aid Administrative Costs To Be Minimized" "Daily Times" (08/29)

"Efforts will be made to minimise the administrative costs Pakistan is supposed to bear in utilising the proposed US assistance but it will need foreign technical expertise in certain areas, US envoy Robin Raphel said on Friday."

"US Donation Of Protective Gear To Pakistan To Help Cope With Outbreak Of Bird Flu" "The News" (08/29)

"Jenet Paz-Castillo, Health Office Chief, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Pakistan, Friday officially handed over \$18,704 worth of personal protective equipment (PPE) kits along with Infectious Substance Insulated Shipper to help Pakistan cope with outbreaks of bird flu."

"Nato Supply Tankers On Fire After Explosion" "Dawn" (08/31)

"At least 15 oil tankers, trailers and containers caught fire in Chaman on Sunday night after a blast in a vehicle carrying supplies for Nato forces in Afghanistan. Hundreds of vehicles have been stuck in the border town over the past two days because of suspension of traffic between Pakistan and Afghanistan."

"Official Of Anti-Terror Squad Killed In Karak" "Dawn" (08/31)

"A DSP of anti-terrorism squad and a constable were killed when terrorists opened fire on a police party near Latambar in Karak early on Sunday morning. Two attackers were also killed when police returned fire."

"Troops Brace For Decisive Offensive" "Dawn" (08/31)

"With Baitullah Mehsud dead, troops may be bracing for a new round of offensive against the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan in the days and weeks ahead to prepare the ground for a decisive assault on South Waziristan, knowledgeable sources say."

"35 Taliban Killed In Afghan Operation" "Dawn" (08/31)

"As Afghans await the results of a fraud-tainted election, a heavy death toll from clashes and bombs, including 35 Taliban and a child, served as a reminder of the challenges the next president faces. In operations mostly concentrated in the south and the east of the country, Afghan security forces, backed by international troops, on Sunday claimed success against an increasingly virulent enemy."

"Al Qaeda Fails To Unite Pakistani Taliban" "Daily Times" (08/31)

"Negotiations between the Taliban of Mullah Nazir group and the supporters of Baitullah Mehsud group have failed despite the reconciliatory efforts of Al Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban, Dunya TV reported on Sunday."

"18 Militants Killed In Swat Operation" "The News" (08/31)

"Eighteen militants were killed and several others were apprehended during the ongoing operation in Tehsil Charbagh in Swat Valley on Sunday."

"Pakistan, Iran Hold Talks On Gas Pipeline Project Today" "The News" (08/31)

"Amid stiff opposition to the IP project from the most influential world capitals one in the West and other in the Middle East, Pakistan and Iran will today (Monday) embark upon the most crucial technical level talks on conditions precedent (CPs), which are prerequisites before making the gas sales purchase agreement effective as the accord has already been signed by both Islamabad and Istanbul."

"Refusal To Limit The Nuclear Program; U.S. Decides To Stop Development Projects In Pakistan Worth \$ 1 Billion," "Pakistan" (cir. 10,000) (08/31)

"Tension is rising between the U.S. and Pakistan over American insistence that Pakistan limit its nuclear program and the Pakistani military leadership's resistance to the idea. Taking the first step in this regard, the U.S. has decided in principle to stop USAID's development projects worth one billion dollars in Pakistan. A formal announcement is expected shortly."

Editorials/Op-eds

"U.S. Admiral's Advice," an editorial in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (08/31)

"It is not just the Obama administration but the American media too that must take note of the observations made by Adm Mike Mullen on US policies towards the Muslim world. In an article he wrote for a military journal, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said America must "worry a lot less about how to communicate [its] actions and much more about what [its] actions communicate". Declaring that American behaviour was often perceived as arrogant, uncaring and insulting. . . In the case of Pakistan, drone attacks, first launched during the Bush presidency, have continued. Although these have targeted militants, there has been considerable collateral damage. . . The Obama administration must try to find a negotiated solution to the Afghan war. . . Adm Mullen's observations should be noted by the American media, especially some of the leading dailies which have played a major role in distorting reality and portraying the Taliban as the true representatives of Muslims worldwide"

"Home Truths," an editorial note in the populist, often sensational national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (08/31)

"America seems to be going through a process of awakening, and gaining a more realistic sense of itself and how others perceive it in the process. The Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman, Admiral Mike Mullen, writes that no amount of public relations exercises will repair the credibility of the US if American behaviour overseas continues to be perceived as 'arrogant, uncaring or insulting' - which it not infrequently is, whether it be by design or accident. As America is currently engaged in warfare with states and peoples where a man's word and honour is paramount it is not difficult to see where the trust deficit comes from. Translating this level of insight and self-awareness into hard policy is not going to be easy, but the good news is that America has the rest of the Obama presidency to turn the ship around though hate is one of those emotions that take millennia to abate."

"Karzai-Holbrooke Meeting," an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (08/31)

". . . USA looks to working with Mr Karzai in a second term, but also wishes to use the election issue, along with corruption and his links with various warlords, to keep up the pressure on him. This can only mean that the USA wishes to use Afghanistan to prop up the position of India, which it has chosen as China's rival in the region, and which is destined to contain it. . ."

"Expansion Of U.S. Embassy In Islamabad - Some Questions" an editorial in the Karachi-based, pro-Taliban Jihadi Urdu daily "Islam" (cir. 15,000) (08/31)

"The admittance of the U.S. Ambassador Patterson, regarding the expansion of U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, has given rise to multiple questions in the minds of the Pakistani masses. They are also expressing their reservations on the reports of the rentals around 200 houses by the U.S. Embassy in posh sectors of the federal capital and installation of highly sensitive surveillance gadgets on those buildings. As far as the 'friendly motives and the assistance plans,' being repeatedly pointed out by the U.S. Embassy, are concerned, the record of the Pak-U.S. bilateral relations during the last three decades shows that Washington leaves no stone unturned to woo Islamabad when it needs the latter's services to secure its interests but abandons it after achieving its goals. In fact, killing of several innocent Pakistanis including women and children in the recent U.S. drone attack will provide an opportunity to Ambassador Patterson to know why the majority of Pakistanis see the U.S. presence in their country with suspicion, whether it is in the form of U.S. Marines, or the infamous Blackwater."

"Precarious Peace," an editorial note in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (08/31)

"The uneasy peace that had returned to Swat after the military operation was finally shattered yesterday with the suicide attack on a police training station.... Provincial information czar Mian Iftikhar Hussein has said that the way this particular incident was carried out was difficult to avoid. That is a chilling revelation; how would things have played out if it weren't for the high alert? Both the military and civil administration needs to get their acts together."

"Cautious Optimism," an editorial in the populist, often sensational national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (08/31)

"More than 80 per cent of the 2.3 million IDPs who fled in the face of a determined onslaught on the Taliban have now returned home and the operation to repatriate the IDPs has gone reasonably well. . . an interesting development that bodes well for the future, it seems that the worm has turned for the Taliban. Lt-Gen Ahmed, chairman of the Special Support Group for the displaced, has told Reuters that the people who had returned were now helping to identify and track-down those who had previously terrorised them. . . If nothing else this points to a return of confidence in the army by those they are there to protect."

"What Lies in Waziristan," an op-ed by Zafar Hilaly in the populist, often sensational national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (08/31)

"Compared to what awaits the Pakistan Army in Waziristan, the Swat operation was a skirmish. There 30,000 Taliban wait to give battle. As fighters, they are matchless and have few equals in the art of mobile warfare. . . It is a small wonder that the Pakistan Army is apprehensive about taking on the Taliban in Waziristan until all preparations have been made. It is equally wondrous that the Americans, having had the bitter experience of charging into situations, ill-prepared to deal with them, would have the Pakistan Army rush in where, what to speak of fools, even angels fear to tread. The Army should take its time. . . The American idea that the current divisions within the Taliban should be exploited by a quick push is just wishful thinking. Nothing will unite the Taliban more than danger from an outside force. . ."

"Why Obama May Fail In Afghanistan," an op-ed by Shahzad Chaudery in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (08/31)

". . . Karzai's house of cards will collapse the day America leaves. Permit him to begin talking to his real brethren so that he can find a stable order. Afghanistan must find its own solution; it simply is not programmed to accept one. That has been re-inscribed in history over and over again. No, this piece is not a demoralising statement about the world's greatest military; it simply is a statement of the fact as it gets seen up close. The world at large has great expectations of Obama 'resetting' America to a more rational role; one that leaves enough space for others to pursue what seems noble to them, particularly in Afghanistan. One hopes he will answer the call of history for his own good and that of America."

"Manmohan's Duplicity," an editorial in liberal Urdu daily "Express" (cir. 25,000) (08/31)

"Analysts feel that Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's refusal to hold talks with Pakistan demonstrates dissatisfaction with Pakistani authorities' attitude as he wanted strong action against the Mumbai attack perpetrators... The Indian leadership should end the suspension of talks with Pakistan so that the people of this region can breathe a sigh of relief."

Patterson